

Court directs state to increase school funding

By The Breeze staff

The State of Kansas has fallen short of adequately funding education. In a nutshell, that is what a Kansas Court found in January when

representation from school districts across the state, including USD 259, supported legal action against the state for not meeting its requirement for per-student spending. “The last time this hap-

pened, the Legislature eventually responded by dramatically increasing base state aid per pupil and satisfying the Supreme Court’s order to fund a suitable education for Kansas students,” the Kansas National

Education Association said in a news release on the court ruling. The economic downturn caused state leaders to scale back the increases, eventually moving to a mark below what

was allocated in a previous decision in 2005. In its January ruling, the court directed the Legislature to honor the base state aid per pupil spending level of \$4,492. Leading up to the court

decision, there had been frustrations with school districts trying to stay adequately staffed with uncertainty over whether or not they’d have enough state funding to meet their needs.

Caban

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based apartment community on the Caban Marketplace property. The proposed apartment community would consist of 150 to 200 residential units to be financed through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In August, the Bel Aire City Council approved a resolution of support for the

residential development. More residential construction is expected to pick up with the inclusion of Bel Aire’s new schools. To put the cherry on top of the downtown district, Blitz said there are plans for about 400 acres within the development to be dedicated to two large sports complexes. In January, the Kansas Sports Academy announced plans to build a 220,000 square-foot modern sports complex on the Caban Marketplace

property. In a press release, developers say the facility will be utilized to host volleyball and basketball tournaments, leagues, clinics and personal skill development. The release said the facility “will provide the best opportunities in coaching and training in the Midwest and will enable efforts to reach out to athletes who wish to experience national exposure in the pursuit of scholarships and/or athletic dreams.”

The sports complex is to include 17 full-sized, wood-floor basketball courts, 25 volleyball courts, eight tennis courts and three outdoor sand volleyball courts, along with weight-training facilities, a multi purpose room for public and private events, conference and meeting rooms, an arcade, a pro shop and a gift shop and a full-service concessions area. The news release said the Kansas Sports Academy plans to break ground on the

complex “later this year.” Blitz said the plans for the STAR bond district were driven by retail interest. “Tenants are what drove the bigger district,” he said. Although the Kansas Sports Academy is the only tenant publicly committed to build in Caban Marketplace, Blitz said he’s received letters of intent from a few potential tenants that are spending money on architecture. Blitz can’t say for sure that

all that is planned for Caban Marketplace will come to fruition or give a timetable on when construction will start, but he did say development is on the way and it will be something that will fit well with the community’s long-term outlook. “I’m sure the people of Bel Aire want the best,” he said. For more information on the plans for Caban Marketplace, contact Blitz at 882-6705 or by e-mail at sedc@cox.net.

Election

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re-election. Council member Peggy O’Donnell has filed to retain her council seat she’s occupied since 2005. She said she wants to stay

on the council, in part, to see through several development plans that have started while she’s served the city. Challengers include Bel Aire Tree Board chairman Guy MacDonald, Carolyn Smith, Jeanette Clement, Shelly Smith, Ramona

Becker, retired Bel Aire Utility Clerk Betty Martine and Andrew Uhlschmidt. In April, one of the candidates will replace Breault. Another will replace Austin. Yet another will fill in to complete the unfinished term limit of Moe Terrebonne.

Terrebonne stepped down from the council in November when he announced plans to move to Florida in retirement. Bel Aire City Clerk Vicky Bradford said the candidate who receives the fourth-highest number of votes in

the April 2 election, will fill in to finish Terrebonne’s term that expires in 2015. The top three vote getters will earn full, four-year terms. Ken Lee is the only council member guaranteed to retain his seat in April when the council will welcome at

least three new members. Lee was appointed to the council in September to fill the seat vacated by Dave Sly. Last fall, Sly’s career as a Boeing engineer moved him and his family from Bel Aire to Oklahoma City.

Concierge

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roadblocks, most recently at the Jan. 8 council meeting. The council said it sent

developers and property owners a letter of intent detailing what the city required from the project before moving forward with financing, but the city never received a response. Developers said

they never received the letter. Bel Aire City Manager Ty Lasher said the council needed more information before it approved the issuance of the industrial revenue bonds.

Namely, the council needed assurance from the property owners that the city would be reimbursed for \$1.2 million in infrastructure improvements. The reimbursement is to come in the form of

special assessments. With the matter resolved on Jan. 15, Lasher said developers have the green light to start construction on the surgical recovery center. He said engineering is

currently under way for the extension of a road to access the facility off Webb Road. He said construction on the surgical recovery center is likely to start this spring.

Team

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He’s changed the name from the Wichita Wheat Kings to the Wichita Aviators, tapping into an identity with Wichita and its aircraft manufacturing industry. Last summer, the Wheat Kings started strong and were in contention for a league championship until a late-season, 11-game losing streak took them out of contention. Wheeler said his goal is to build off of what the team was able to accomplish prior to the late-summer slide. “I think what the league felt like was, this is a team to be reckoned with,” Wheeler said. To maintain the success for an entire summer and realize a team goal to qualify for the National Baseball Congress World Series in Wichita, Wheeler said he would recruit talent from beyond the local level to join the Aviators. “To really raise the level

of our organization and be a contender, I felt it was vital for us to recruit on the national level,” Wheeler said. The majority of the roster expected to suit up for the Aviators this summer consists of high-caliber NCAA Division II players. There are also about five NCAA Division I players expected to play, Wheeler said. Mixed with some local talent, the roster will include players from California and the southeastern United States. With the first pitch of the summer less than five months away, Wheeler is seeking host families to provide a place to stay for his players from outside the Wichita area. The Aviators owner said his 28-man roster would be comprised of players with solid morals and character. Besides baseball, Wheeler said he has a passion for

Christian ministry, which he became involved with in college at Johnson County Community College and Kansas State University. Wheeler was part of the Johnson County pitching staff before a torn rotator cuff ended his playing career. He finished his college career at K-State. After college, Wheeler coached baseball at the small college level, on the staffs for Evangel University, the University of Ottawa and Hesston College. Today, the husband and soon-to-be father works as a business analyst in Wichita and lives in Bel Aire.

In combining his passions, Wheeler said he wants the Aviators to have a Christian identity. Players don’t have to be Christians, but they should understand that they have to have the right character to compete with maturity and perseverance, Wheeler said. The Aviators will play their home games at Maize High School this summer. If interested in hosting an Aviators player, call Wheeler at (785) 317-5747 or reach him by e-mail at wichitaav

iatorsbaseball@gmail.com. A host family interest form and more information on the new team is available on the Aviators’ website, www.wichitaaviators.com. “We want to make sure our host families are the right fit for our players and vice versa,” Wheeler said. Wheeler is taking over the summer league team a year after serving as the general manager for the Wheat Kings. Last summer, the team showed flashes of being a contender. Now it’s time to

take the next step, Wheeler said. As the Aviators owner, Wheeler said his plan is to build off last year’s successes and establish a team full of high-character athletes that routinely competes in the NBC World Series.

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Joined by her family in the school's auditorium Jan. 23, Sunrise Christian Academy senior soccer player Monica Lewis signs a letter of intent to play for Hutchinson Community College next year.

Sunrise senior signs to play soccer at Hutchinson

By Matt Heilman

Sunrise Christian Academy senior soccer player Monica Lewis won't hang up the cleats when she graduates high school this spring. On Jan. 23, Lewis signed her letter of intent to play for at least two more years at Hutchinson Community College. Hutch, a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association, has become a force in the Jayhawk Conference and on the national stage.

When she gets to Hutchinson, Lewis, a forward, said she'd have a chance to see a lot of playing time early for a Blue Dragon team that graduated a couple key sophomores from last season's club that saw its season end in the NJCAA Regional finals.

Lewis said she was drawn to the school after she had a chance to visit the campus, scrimmage with some players on the Blue Dragon roster and meet Hutchinson Community College women's soccer head coach, Sammy Lane.

"She really enjoyed the

environment and the girls there," Lewis' mother, Katia Dort said.

Sunrise soccer coach Eddie Blackmon said Lewis has a good vision of the ball and the field.

The forward has led the Buffaloes in scoring over the last couple seasons.

"She knows how to play the game," Blackmon said.

He said he was proud to see Lewis rewarded with a chance to play at the next level after she decided to stay at Sunrise through her high school career.

"My biggest thing with Monica is that she stuck with us," Blackmon said. "Some other kids go other places, thinking they're gonna get big-time looks, but she stuck it out here. I'm grateful for that."

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Burmese refugees settling in

By The Breeze staff

Christ Lutheran's sponsorship of several Burmese refugees continues to go well.

In August, the church welcomed its first family to Wichita — Saw Moe and Naw Shar. Naw Shar was eight months pregnant at the time and gave birth to baby Joseph about a month later.

Volunteers from the church have formed deep relationships with this young family, showering them with love and gifts, and providing for them a new family. They continue to visit Saw Moe, Naw Shar and Joseph on a weekly basis, helping in any way they can — offering rides to the store, helping apply for jobs, practicing driving, familiarizing them with Wichita, offering parenting advice.

Park City Pride has also been involved by attending a baby shower and helping provide many of their initial necessities.

Saw Moe, Naw Shar and Joseph spent Christmas Day at Pastor Chad Langdon's house, and they were excited to receive Christmas presents from the church, including a new laptop computer.

Transitions toward autonomy are starting to happen for the family. They have learned some essential skills, such as setting up a bank account, conversing in English, paying bills, and using the Internet. Saw Moe has earned his driver's license.



Saw Moe and Naw Shar with their son, Joseph, are supported by Christ Lutheran Church volunteers.

Christ Lutheran continues to pray for a job for Saw Moe. When they are accepted as immigrants, they are given six months by the government to find a job and become autonomous. They arrived Aug. 3, so the clock is ticking, not just for this church's family, but for all the refugee families who have come from Burma recently.

There are now nine Burmese families that have been resettled to Wichita through Episcopal Wichita Area Refugee Ministries (EWARM). They are a strong support for one another, but Saw Moe has emerged as a

clear leader among them.

Everyone who has contact with the refugees agrees that the volunteers have received far more than the refugees.

On Jan. 6, as a way to say thank-you, the refugee family cooked an entire Burmese meal for all the members of Christ Lutheran Church. On Jan. 13, the volunteers were invited to celebrate the Karen New Year

(Karen is their ethnic culture) with all of the other sponsoring organizations. The hospitality that the refugees show is at times overwhelming. They are always ready with a glass of juice or tea, and a plate of grapes or apples to share with their visitors.

Not every refugee family from Burma has been able to be matched up with a sponsoring church or organization. When members of Christ Lutheran heard about this, they stepped up to sponsor another family. Their new family is Kyaw Kyaw (husband), Naw Ling (wife), and their 2 year-old daughter, Cindy.

To learn more about the plight of these refugees and the conditions that forced them to flee, you can visit the website www.freeburmangers.org. To support these families (there are more on their way), you can visit EWARM's website at www.ewarm.org.

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